

Theatre

Overall grade boundaries

Grade:	E	D	C	B	A
Mark range:	0 - 7	8 - 15	16 - 22	23 - 28	29 - 36

The range and suitability of the work submitted

The work submitted ranged quite widely. There was a welcome tendency to research closer to home, including some excellent examples of candidates looking to thematic concerns of their own theatrical environment and their own country. There were research questions on the following: theory, Brecht, Boal, Brooke and Meisner, on theatre practice and tradition: Butoh, Commedia, Noh, Kathakali and Kabuki, and Aboriginal; on different kinds of theatre: Improvisational, theatre for prisons, and verbatim theatre; on production elements, design, lighting and sound; on particular authors; Kane, Brecht, Shakespeare, Chekhov and Lawlor. Some of the work deemed unsuitable tended to be on research questions which dealt with the general purpose of theatre. Needless to add they were not very specific in their treatment of the topic, and as such were unable to address the assessment criteria as well as other more focused essays could.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criterion A: research question

This is a key skill and there were a few candidates who would have been better served by less ambitious questions. The more specific the research question the better, and the importance of a question emerging from a research foundation usually helps too.

Criterion B: introduction

The placing of the research question into an academic context can be challenging in this subject, but it is an essential feature that far too many candidates only attempt in a general fashion. The contextualization of the question is crucial.

Criterion C: investigation

The research methodologies available to the enthusiastic candidate are numerous, but far too often there is an undue dependency on the internet which is used in a manner verging on the indiscriminate. This is an academic exercise and needs to have this reflected and supported by serious research. The candidates who succeeded under this component had specific reason for their source exploration; the candidates who did not were aimless and random in their meandering search for information. The specific focus of the former helped to keep the candidate on task, while the generalizations which were the result of the latter gave a vague

unconvincing aspect to the work. Action research was a common approach and often done well but candidates need to be more rigorous with their attempts at qualitative research. . Many of the essays appear to have been written at the last minute, and as such only had time to refer to very few sources.

Criterion D: knowledge and understanding of the topic studied

Many candidates struggled with this criterion. One thing cannot be gainsaid, if the candidate chooses a research question there will always be a presupposition that they are familiar with it. Surprisingly this was not always the case, and was perhaps more evident in the bigger topics than the more focused ones where the candidate had obviously made the correct decision to work through a limited area of focus systematically. More ambitious questions led to sometimes sketchy evidence for knowledge and understanding.

Criterion E: reasoned argument

The essay needs to have an argument. Too often candidates presented work which was little more than description with little attempt at anything else. The candidate must demonstrate a perspective as well as a position, and there should be the consideration of counter-arguments in order to bring discussion into the work. Sources are not infallible and more often than not, candidates will be obliged to use fallible, unreliable sources, their awareness of this in their investigation and their ability to convey these research issues is important. Candidates too often simply accepted a source as a unit of information and so neither questioned the validity of the data, nor challenged it. Good candidates took a far more nuanced approach.

Criterion F: application of analytical and evaluative skills appropriate to the subject

Performance against this criterion was usually of a high standard; candidates seemed far more comfortable with this than analyzing theory or literature. The understanding that roles in theatre vary in their purpose was not always completely understood. The tendency to “accept” theory and practice without any question was again a tendency of weaker candidates who took an uncritical position in relation to their material. The researcher needs to be critical and sceptical, not passive and accepting.

Criterion G: use of language appropriate to the subject

Theatre roles have specific terminology and descriptive language applied to them. Usually candidates are most challenged in this sense when they go into technical areas, like lighting or sound. Since there were only three essays this session which looked at production this did not occur so often. There was the usual dependence on key words which were not always entirely understood. Brecht was once again popular as a writer and practitioner, so examiners encountered “alienation” used poorly. “Alienation” and the “emotional memory” associated with Stanislavski are arguably the most misunderstood concepts at this level.

Criterion H: conclusion

Too often points were lost against this criterion by not looking at the question of possible further research and how the essay might have opened into areas of new knowledge. Time

and again the conclusion was simply a general summary of what had been written, and candidates should be reminded that the guide outlines the requirements of a conclusion.

Criterion I: formal presentation

Headings, footnoting, bibliography, appropriate use of images and their annotation are not difficult but are vital to the establish research credibility. One or more of these requirements were often omitted, and that was sometimes something as simple as page numbers, or a consistent application of an academic referencing system. Too often long bibliographies listed many sources that were not cited in the body of the essay.

Criterion J: abstract

There were a lot of examples of poorly constructed abstracts. The requirements of the abstract are outlined in the guide, but many omitted the mention of the conclusion.

Criterion K: holistic judgement

Many essays scored highly against this criterion. The supervisor report helps the examiner for criterion K.

Recommendations for the supervision of future candidates

- Ensure that the candidate has an appropriately focussed research question, and not a general one, broad and unmanageable one.
- The candidate as well as the supervisor must ensure familiarity with the criteria before the exercise begins. It is advisable to go through the mechanics and technicalities of the exercise thoroughly, after all many marks awarded for this assessment task are awarded for procedural rather than intellectual skills.
- Encourage the candidate to be adventurous in the research paths they follow. A workshop on research possibilities for theatre might be a useful way of inducting them into this area of knowledge.
- Theatre is a visual as well as verbal art, candidates should be encouraged to explore the visual as a possible source, artifacts, works of art, the museum, the exposition, all await the researcher.
- Encourage the candidate to respect the terminology that is special to the subject, as the ability to use this correctly will be assessed.
- Candidates can be encouraged to think locally to facilitate personal engagement and insight.
- Encourage conviction, encourage subversion, discourage passivity.